

Mysterious Incident Has Far-Reaching Effect on One Domestic Situation.

THE SECOND COMING OF MRS. BAIN'S FIRST HUSBAND

BY IRVIN S. COBB, In The Star's Series of American Fiction.

The Author: Irvin S. Cobb has been and done many things—newspaper man, war correspondent, author, playwright, etc.—but he has never been able to write a story that has been as successful as the one he is now writing. He has been writing for years, but his work has never been as successful as the one he is now writing. He has been writing for years, but his work has never been as successful as the one he is now writing.

first he set eyes on her. She had lately returned from Honolulu; it was in Honolulu that she had been bereft, as the saying is, by the hand of death. And Honolulu is a long distance from Brockway, Mass., where Tom Bain's people, a stay-at-home stock, had lived these five generations past.

So, on those frequently recurring occasions when Mrs. Bain, with a saddened, almost a wistful air, was moved to remind herself of her first husband's marvelous qualities—temperament, disposition, tact, amiability or what not—there was for her second husband nothing to do except to suffer on in an impotent silence. It is not well that any one on this earth—more especially a husband—should be required to suffer discomforts in silence. Suffering calls for vocal expression.

Otherwise, as human beings go, Mr. and Mrs. Bain were well suited and contented. It was that dead first husband of hers, who, invoked by her, kept rising up to mar the reasonable happiness which might have been theirs. The thing was getting on his nerves. Indeed, at the time this brief narrative begins, it already had got upon his nerves. He had come to the point where frequently he wished there had never been such a thing as a first husband.

THERE were even times when he almost permitted himself the wish that there never had been such things as second husbands, either.

With the acute vividness of a war-scarred veteran remembering the first time he was shot, he could remember the occasion when Mrs. Bain's former husband first came into his life. They had been married just two months then. The honeymoon was in its last quarter. If the couple were ever to go along together in harmony the time had now come when mutual understanding must succeed the period of adjustment and balance. She had the benefit of experience on her side; for she had been through the process once before. Tom Bain might be a green hand at this business of being married, but, subconsciously, he was beginning to adjust himself in his ordained and proper place in the matrimonial scheme as it related to him and this very charming lady. In other words, he had reached the place where he was slipping out of the bridegroom pose into the less studied and more matter-of-fact status of a husband.

He was ready to quit acting a part and be his own self again always, though with regard for the limitations and restrictions imposed by the new estate upon which he had entered.

The campaign against him—we may as well call it a campaign—opened on the evening following their return from the trip to White Sulphur. That first day at his desk had been a hard one; so much which seemed to require his personal attention had accumulated while he was away. He left the office pretty well tired out. On his way home he built up a pleasant vision of a nice quiet

little dinner and then a peaceful hour or so in the living room in slippers and an old smoking jacket.

Mrs. Bain met him at the door with a greeting that put him in thorough good humor. This, he decided, was the best of all possible worlds to live in and his, undoubtedly, was the best of all possible ways of living.

"You're late, dear," she said. "You've just time to run upstairs and slip on your evening clothes. I've laid them out for you."

"Why, there's nobody coming in for dinner, is there?" he asked.

"No, there's no one coming," she said. "What difference does that make?"

"Well," he said, "I'm rather fagged out and I sort of thought that, seeing there'd be only the two of us, I'd come to the table just as I am."

"Very well, dear," she said, "suit yourself."

But he took note that she had shortened the superlative "dearest" to "dear." Also she slipped herself out of the circle of his encircling arm. Suddenly there was a suggestion—a



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bare trace—or an autumnal chill in the air.

"Suit yourself," she repeated.

But, as a newly married man, how could he suit himself? He clad himself in the starched shirt, the high, tight collar that pinched his throat, the pinched patent leathers, and all the rest of the funeral regalia in which civilized man incases himself on any supposedly festive occasions. She gave him an approving look when, ten minutes later, he presented himself before her.

"Tom," she said as they sat down, "I think you always should dress for dinner. Arthur always said that a gentleman should dress for dinner."

He stared at her, puzzled. "Arthur?" he echoed. "Who's Arthur?"

"My first husband," she explained. "Arthur looked so well in his evening clothes."

"Oh," he said, like that. That was all he said for a minute or so. He was thinking.

She was thinking, too. Practically all women are popularly supposed to have intuition, and certainly this

one did. She was thinking of the miniature Venus who had been coquetting with his imagination all morning became more distinct. Surely this dear little thing, who looked so innocent, who had smiled so engagingly at him with gratitude in her eyes, could not be the thief! Yet if it should be she! Strange things happen in New York, and imperative personal necessities arise. Some are driven to crime.

Yet Joy would not believe it! If they had her in custody, he would go bail for her. More than that, he would employ the best lawyer in town to defend her. He might even go beyond that!

Joy was trembling with nervousness as he entered headquarters. He happened to know the inspector who had the matter in charge. They shook hands.

"I should like to talk with you a bit," said Joy, very nervous, "before we—before I—"

"Oh, that can wait! I want you to see the prisoner, for possible identification."

There is something quite peremptory about police inspectors. They have a way that is definite, and Joy was not used to their arbitrary habit.

With his heart in his mouth he followed the quick step of the inspector to the room where the pickpocket was in custody.

And there he saw the tough-looking fellow who had sat in front of him in the subway.

Joy rose the next morning at his usual time. "Telephone Jeffards," he said to Raymond, his valet, "that I shall not use either car this morning."

"Yes, sir," the valet, somewhat astonished, replied. "You are not going to business?"

"Oh, yes! But I'm going in the subway."

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